

Strategy & Resources Committee – 24 November 2020

Discretionary Test and Trace Support Payment – adoption of policy

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Publication status:	Unrestricted
Wards affected:	All wards
Recommendations:	That the Discretionary Test and Trace Payment Scheme detailed at Appendix A be ratified.
Appendices:	Appendix A – Discretionary Test and Trace Payment Scheme
Background papers defined by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985	None

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 On 25 September the Government published guidance that set out what local authorities in England needed to do to enable people in their area to claim the Test and Trace Support Payment, including discretionary payments.
- 1.2 From 28 September 2020, individuals are entitled to a test and trace support payment or discretionary support payment of £500. This is to support people on low incomes who are unable to work from home if they are told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace and will lose income as a result. These payments are designed to help ensure people who have tested positive for COVID19 and their close contacts self-isolate for the required period to stop the onward spread of the virus. They are also designed to encourage individuals who are eligible for this payment to get tested if they have symptoms. This is important to help stop the transmission of COVID-19 and avoid further economic and societal restrictions.
- 1.3 The scheme will last until 31 January 2021.
- 1.4 The requirements of the Government Guidance relating to the test and Trace Support Payment Scheme meant that the scheme had to be set up and implemented within a very short time frame. A Test and Trace Discretionary Payment Policy was developed and approved by the Chief Executive by means of an Urgency Decision

on 4 November 2020 pending review and ratification by the Strategy and Resources Committee.

2. Background

2.1 Test and Trace Support Payment

Eligibility for a £500 Test and Trace Support Payment is restricted to people who:

- have been told to stay at home and self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace, either because they have tested positive for coronavirus or have recently been in close contact with someone who has tested positive;
- are employed or self-employed;
- are unable to work from home and will lose income as a result; and
- are currently receiving Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, income-based Employment and Support Allowance, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit and/or Pension Credit.

2.2 Discretionary payment

Local authorities can make a £500 discretionary payment to individuals who:

- have been told to stay at home and self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace, either because they have tested positive for coronavirus or have recently been in close contact with someone who has tested positive;
- are employed or self-employed; and
- are unable to work from home and will lose income as a result.

In addition, the discretionary payment is for people:

- who are not currently receiving Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, income-based Employment and Support Allowance, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit and/or Pension Credit;

And

- who are on low incomes and will face financial hardship as a result of not being able to work while they are self-isolating.

2.3 Local authorities can introduce additional criteria to determine eligibility for discretionary payments in their area, as long as these operate in addition to, rather than instead of, the criteria set out above.

2.4 For both the Test and Trace Support Payment and discretionary payments, eligible individuals will receive their £500 payment on top of any benefits and Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) that they currently receive.

3. Tandridge additional criteria

3.1 Given that funding for the Discretionary Scheme is limited, the following additional criteria for determining eligibility for discretionary payments have been included in the policy.

- Individuals who have made a claim for Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, income-based Employment and Support Allowance, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit and/or Pension Credit and it is likely that this claim will be successful;
- Individuals from abroad who are excluded from claiming benefits but meet all the other statutory and discretionary criteria;
- Individuals whose gross annual household income is less than £20,000 a year (£385 per week), although consideration will be given for higher annual incomes if the Council is provided with a suitable justification that is in the spirit of the grant;
- The individual's employer must confirm that as a result of his/her isolation s/he will lose pay, as a result of the terms of his/her contract;
- If the individual is self-employed, the self-employment must clearly be of the nature where s/he cannot work from home;
- The individual does not have capital exceeding £6,000.

3.2 The Discretionary Test and Trace Scheme is aimed at people who are not in receipt of a qualifying benefit. It is considered appropriate that people who have a pending claim for a qualifying benefit, and their claim is likely to be successful should be eligible for a payment.

3.3 People who do not have recourse to public funds will not be able to claim specified benefits but may have been able to work and loss of earnings may present them with exceptional hardship.

3.4 The gross annual income has been calculated based on the National Living Wage of £9.30 per hour for a 40-hour working week.

3.5 The qualifying capital limit is equivalent to the capital limit for a claim for Universal Credit

4. Other options considered

4.1 It is a Government requirement and local authorities develop a Discretionary Test and Trace Payment Scheme, so no other options were considered.

5. Climate Change implications

5.1 There are no significant environmental / sustainability implications associated with this report.

6. Equality implications

6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed which has not identified any negative impacts as a result of this Policy. A copy of the EIA is available in the background papers to this report.

7. Any other corporate implications where applicable

7.1 There are not considered to be any other corporate implications associated with this report.

8. Comments of the Chief Finance Officer

8.1 There is no impact of the Councils revenue budgets as the Council will receive a fixed amount of funding from Government which will be for the four months that the Discretionary Scheme is intended to last. Government has confirmed that no additional funding will be given to the council.

Grant funding awarded –

- Standard Scheme £28,000
- Discretionary Scheme - £17,051
- Administration - £20,000 fixed element and £4,166 based on the allocated funding awarded.

8.2 The administration grant the Council will receive will cover officers time and also systems upgrade to accommodate the administration of the Grant's processes.

8.3 Government has stated that both the standard and discretionary schemes will be available to 31 January 2021. The grant for the scheme is fixed and limited. The Discretionary Scheme will close before the 31 January 2021 if the funding is exhausted.

9. Comments of the Head of Legal Services

9.1 The Department of Health and Social Care on 30th September issued the operational guidance titled 'The Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme: Implementation Guide for Local Authorities in England' for the implementation of the Test and Trace Support Payments scheme. The guidance permits local authorities to make a £500 discretionary payments to eligible individuals.

9.2 Authorities are also able to introduce additional criteria to determine eligibility for discretionary payments in their area, as long as these operate in addition to, rather than instead of, the criteria set out in the guidance.

9.3 The Council's policy is intended to facilitate the discretionary payment arrangement and is within the ambit of the government guidance. The Test and Trace Support Payment scheme started from 28 September 2020 and the Council was expected to have arrangements in place to administer payments from 12 October 2020. The decision to utilise the Council's Urgency provisions and its implementation was therefore urgent and time critical.

10. Conclusion

10.1 The Council has implemented the Discretionary Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme in line with Government requirements and guidance.

10.2 The Discretionary Test and Trace Support Payment Policy has been developed to ensure those facing financial hardship as a result of a requirement to self-isolate and who are not eligible for payments under the standard scheme are able to receive financial support.

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